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ENG 5003-001: Revenge Tragedy

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ENGLISH 5003 – “REVENGE TRAGEDY”

Fall 2009 / Section 001
 W 7-9:30 PM
 Coleman Hall 3170 / 1255

Dr. Chris Wixson
 Coleman Hall: 3871
 Office Hours: TBA
 (Or by appointment)

There was never yet philosopher who could endure the toothache patiently.
 William Shakespeare

The body's inside . . . shows up in order to compensate for the collapse of the border between
 inside and outside. Julia Kristeva

In Shakespeare one sentence begets the next naturally; the meaning is all inwoven.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge

What does the body mean to say by trembling or crying?

Jacques Derrida

A significant trend in Early Modern studies over the past ten years has been characterized as a “corporeal turn”, a shifting focus from (in critic Keir Elam’s words) “the word to the flesh, the semantic to the somatic”. The pile of maimed corpses, severed limbs, and outright atrocity that constitute 17th Century English revenge tragedy as a genre make it a perfect site to explore not only the scholarly intellectual currents referred to as “body criticism” but also the ways in which the staged body illuminates anxieties about race, gender, class, nation, sexuality, and the limits of representation itself. As much as the body is a central obsession of these plays, they are equally and peculiarly obsessed with notions of “inwardness”, memory, and subjectivity, each of which (in Hamlet’s words) “passes show” – not surprisingly since Galenic humoral theory saw psychology intimately tied to physiology.

We will begin by reading some theory/criticism and discussing the much-derided Shakespearean masterpiece *Titus Andronicus* and the much-lauded Shakespearean masterpiece *Hamlet*. The rest of the course will focus on the delicious perversities and shocking spectacles of the Jacobean stage in works by Thomas Middleton and John Webster, as well as two 1630s plays in the same tradition by John Ford and William Heminge. In addition to very close readings and re-readings of the plays, there will be a fair amount of secondary readings in theory, history, and criticism. Our focus on the body will also include semi-regular excursions into theatrical practice as we attempt some somatic interpretations of our own. Hopefully, enrollment in the course will indicate an enthusiasm for English Renaissance drama as well as some grounding in the usual suspects among the plays of William Shakespeare. We will be reading two of his plays and working on stage with excerpts from three others. Especially for the latter, access to an anthology of his work and the *OED* is very helpful.

Rather than reading widely in the period and the genre, we will focus our conversation more narrowly, allowing us more time with fewer texts and the scholarly discussion around them. Nonetheless, the complexity of these plays and articles in terms of language, style, and thematics makes this course reading intensive. It has a demanding assignment schedule that necessitates time and planning in order to pass this course. Due to its class size, we will run the course as an advanced seminar, experimental in nature. As such, we will take as a foundational assumption Donald Finkel's idea that "knowledge is grounded in some other process than transfer from an unimpeachable Authority," that our work together is a collaborative process of inquiry. For our endeavor to succeed, there are three preconditions that must be met: everyone must have done the reading and done it critically and carefully; everyone must be willing to take intellectual risks and be open to uncertainty; and everyone must be willing to engage respectfully. At the beginning of each session, we will all contribute thoughtful questions and go from there.

Required Textbooks: *Three Classical Tragedies*, William Shakespeare
The Duchess of Malfi, John Webster
Five Plays, Thomas Middleton
Five Lectures on Psycho-Analysis, Sigmund Freud
Hamlet, William Shakespeare

Our secondary readings as well as two of our plays can be accessed either through Booth Library E-reserve or journal databases.

Course Policies

Attendance

Mandatory.

If you become suddenly ill (think Bubonic plague) or the victim of emergency circumstances, please email me or a member of the seminar as soon as possible and stay in touch. Excused absences are accompanied by appropriate legal or medical documentation. Any unexcused absence will seriously undermine your success in this course.

Class Participation

Mandatory.

Think of our meetings as potluck conversations; everyone simply must contribute. Participation in a seminar means careful preparation of the reading, frequent contributions to discussions, and engaged critical thought. You should come to each session armed with observations, opinions, questions, and insights, ready to take an active part in the ongoing dialogue about the course materials and your projects.

In addition to your short papers, what else you bring to share need not be written out (although you may be asked to do so) but should refer to specific passages in the reading as the basis for formulating a broader discussion topic. Come to class with an agenda. That means coming with lucrative questions that you think **the texts** are asking with their form and content, not simply questions you have about the texts. In addition, you may also wish to read the introductions to our plays, although I would advise doing so AFTER you have read each play; consider this sentence a formal spoiler alert. Besides preparation, class participation also means responding constructively, respectfully, and energetically to what other seminarians share, that you work actively to stretch yourself intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually. In short, you are expected to work actively to contribute to the class's overall movement and to strive to promote dialogue between yourself and other seminarians. **I TAKE THIS GRADE VERY SERIOUSLY.**

On days marked for performance, please wear comfortable clothing. We will meet in Coleman Hall 1255 (the auditorium). On the Shakespearean stage, the presence of the actor was known as "the ability of the body". Our explorations of these texts this term will include acts of interpretation *performed* as we seek ourselves to embody the language. You will not be judged on acting ability; this side of the course is an opportunity to approach the act of interpretation in a different way than we do as scholars. There will be a (hopefully only initial) trepidation with and uncertainty surrounding this approach. Exploring these plays outside of our comfort zones will yield insightful results, especially in relation to the course topic.

If you plan on doing any of the following things, you should probably drop this class:

1. Remaining in your comfort zone and not talking in class and justifying the silence by saying you are 'just the type of person who likes to sit back and listen to what everyone else has to say.' Certainly, listening is a premium in this class and is a crucial human skill. But real listening only happens in an exchange. Letting everyone else do the talking means that you're not really listening because you are busy keeping yourself safe. Of course, this 'safety' is an illusion.

2. Remaining in your comfort zone and not talking in class and justifying the silence because you assume that you don't know enough to participate in class and other people (especially those who talk) do. To approach the class and the work in a way that suggests that one can speak only about what is already known is not only dangerous, but it's also intellectually lazy.

3. Complaining when everyone does talk that it's a waste of time and inefficient. Or remaining so married to ways you have been taught in other courses and disciplines that you see as a 'tangent' any meaningful, principled discussion or activity that doesn't necessarily mention the word "theme" or "symbolism." Just because the normative educational culture of a nation afraid more than anything else that its students will learn to think divides classroom activity into binaries of 'on-task' and 'off-task' doesn't mean that that is a useful or even humane way of doing things.

I will serve as a resource and guide and occasionally cranky curmudgeon, but it's your class to shape and energize. Individually and collectively, this course carries with it a responsibility to drive the inquiry and conversation.

N.B. As our theatrical endeavors will involve movement, wear comfortable clothing to our class meetings.

Cell Phones and Computers

You may bring your computer to class with you, assuming that you use it in a scholarly and responsible fashion. This means that you will only have applications and windows related to the current discussion open. **You may not check** email, news, or box scores, surf the web, use chat applications, play games, or otherwise distract yourself and those around you from the class conversation with your computer. You are likewise expected to use cell phones in a responsible manner: **switch them to vibrate when you come in to class. Under no conditions are you allowed to** text message, take pictures or video (illegal in class), play games, or use the cell phone in any other manner during class. The nature of our scholarly endeavor together necessitates mutual respect and dedicated attention during the too short time we have to discuss these texts. Violating any of these policies will result in your participation grade being lowered by a full letter grade for each instance.

Other Sundry Matters

****If you have a *documented* disability and wish to receive academic accommodations, please contact the Office of Disability Services (581-6583) as soon as possible.**

Late papers

These are no fun for me to keep track of and only put you further behind. For each day beyond the scheduled due date, late papers will be penalized a third of a letter grade. **After a week, I will no longer accept the paper, and it becomes a “0.”** Again, if you become ill or the victim of emergency circumstances, please email me as soon as possible and stay in touch.

Longer Paper Topic

It is important to identify as early as possible in the term your area of interest for the final paper. (I am assuming seminarians are bringing with them critical problems and issues of interest to them from earlier coursework.) A draft is due in mid-October so I advise you very strongly to do a couple things. One, the course is focused on a half dozen plays; reading them early in the course allows you to get a sense of the movement of the semester and pinpoint plays that speak to your topic. In fact, it is expected that plays will be read and reread. Two, come see me. I can hopefully save you some time and point you in lucrative directions. If, for instance, you would like to focus on the racialized body (beyond the usual “Italian”), Heminge’s *Fatal Contract* is the play to study.

Plagiarism

Any paper with your name on it signifies that you are the author--that the wording and major ideas are yours, with exceptions indicated by either quotation marks and/or citations. Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use (appropriation and/or imitation) of others' materials (words and ideas). Evidence of plagiarism will result in one or more of the following: a failing grade for the assignment, an F in the course, and a report filed with the Office of Student Standards.

Conferences

I am regularly available to meet with you during my scheduled office hours or by appointment and expect members of the course to drop by periodically to touch base with me on papers and projects for the course. To make an appointment, speak to me after class or contact me via email.

Grading

Shorter Critical Paper	10%	Short Papers	30%
Longer Critical Paper	20%		
Performance Participation	20%	Discussion Hosting / Participation	20%

****Because this is an advanced course (thus a thinking-intensive and collaborative venture), you must be committed to becoming more resourceful and reflective as an interpreter, researcher, discussant, and writer. The degree to which you demonstrate this development in class and in your written work will certainly be a factor in my determination of your term grade.**

****You must complete all assignments to complete the course. Failure to complete any one of the components represents incomplete work for the semester and anyone with incomplete work will not receive a passing grade for the course.**

Group Hosting

Everyone will be required to group "host" a session. You are responsible for the entire session and may structure it as you wish with a few caveats. Since we will have read them, your primary emphasis in presenting the critical articles is precision, concision, and clarity --- not only what they each individually say but how they speak to one another. You are representing a critical conversation, not a series of isolated pieces. The bulk of the session should focus on the play through the lens of the various voices in this conversation --- how the play both supports and challenges the readings presented --- and situating ourselves within this critical conversation. As we are devoting space to it in other sections of the course, this should be a scholarly endeavor; no "acting out" of scenes in class.

Assignments:

***Two critical papers that are engaged, engaging, and articulate. The first will be narrowly focused a *Notes and Queries*-style assignment. The second is a 10-12 page conference length paper, the topic developed in consultation with me.**

***Three Short papers two single-spaced pages in length. See prompts below.**

*Active, Engaged Participation in Discussion --- defined as TALKING productively

*Group “hosting” of one play.

*Active, Engaged Participation in Performance – defined as TAKING risks
(five or so orchestrations, performance activities, final speech)

Schedule of Assignments

THIS SCHEDULE MAY CHANGE AT ANY TIME ACCORDING TO THE NEEDS AND DEMANDS OF THE CLASS. MAKE SURE YOU ALWAYS BRING IT WITH YOU FOR MODIFICATION.

August	26	Course Introduction Screening of Juliet Taymor’s <i>Titus</i> (1999)
September	2	Scarry, Introduction to “The Body in Pain” (handout) Foucault, <i>Discipline and Punish</i> , pages 32-69 (handout) Marshall, “The Pornographic Economy of <i>Titus Andronicus</i> ” (E-reserve) Shakespeare’s <i>Titus Andronicus</i> and Sonnet #130
	9	Shakespeare’s <i>Titus</i> Lisa Dickson, “‘High’ Art and ‘Low’ Blows” (Database) Deborah Willis, “The Gnawing Vulture” (Database) Louise Noble, “‘And Make Two Pasties of Your Shameful Heads’: Medicinal Cannibalism and Healing the Body Politic in <i>Titus Andronicus</i> (Database) Greenfield, “Christopher Marlowe’s Wound Knowledge” (handout) Short “Situating” Paper Due Orchestration: <i>Henry VI Part Three</i>
	16	Shakespeare’s <i>Hamlet</i> Orchestration: <i>Winter’s Tale</i>
	23	Shakespeare’s <i>Hamlet</i> Warley, Christopher “Specters of Horatio” (database) Hawkes, “Telmah” (e-reserve) Bacon, “On Revenge” (handout) Orchestration: <i>Julius Caesar</i>
	30	Performance (<i>Shakespeare</i>) – Wear comfortable clothing Review and Bring all Three Orchestrations / Coleman Hall 1255 Short Critical Paper Due
October	7	(?)Middleton’s <i>The Revenger’s Tragedy</i> Short “Body Part” Paper Due

- 14 Middleton's *Revenger's*
 Stallybrass, "Reading the Body" (handout)
 Neill, "Death and *The Revenger's Tragedy*" (handout)
 Coddin, "Necrophilia and *The Revenger's Tragedy*"
Discussion Lead #1
- 21 Performance (*Revenger's*) --- Wear comfortable clothing
 Reading TBA / Coleman Hall 1255
Long Critical Paper Draft Due (4-6 pages)
- 28 Middleton's *Women Beware Women*
 Kunin, "Shakespeare's Preservation Fantasy"
 Anthony Dawson, "*Women Beware Women* and the Economy of Rape"
 Celia Daileader, "Eroticism on the Renaissance Stage" (excerpts)
 (pages 23-31 and 107-14) (handout)
Discussion Lead #2
- November 4 Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*
Short Paper Due – Lisa Hopkins' "The Interiors of *The Duchess of Malfi*"
- 11 Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*
 Linda Woodbridge, "Queen of Apricots" (E-Reserve)
 Susan Zimmerman, "Invading the Grave" (E-Reserve)
 Celia Daileader, "Eroticism on the Renaissance Stage" (handout)
 Maurizio Calbi, "That Body of Hers" (E-reserve)
 Elizabeth Oakes, "Tragedy of Identity"
Discussion Lead #3

****Reminder:** Literature Conference Keynote lectures are on Friday the 13th. Alexandra Bennett (Northern Illinois University) will speak at 9:00 AM about "Women in Shakespeare" and Don-John Dugas (Kent State University) will speak on "Popularizing, Purifying, and Profiting from Shakespeare" at 10:00 AM. Both talks will happen in the Doudna Recital Hall.

- 18 Performance (*Duchess*) --- Wear comfortable clothing
 Reading TBA / Coleman Hall 1255

HAPPY THANKSGIVING BREAK!

- December 2 John Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* (E-reserve)
 Susan J. Wiseman, "Representing the Incestuous Body" (handout)
 Michael Neill, "What Strange Riddle's This?" (handout)
 Richard A. McCabe, "*'Tis Pity She's a Whore* and Incest" (handout)
Discussion Lead #4
- 9 William Heminge's *The Fatal Contract* (E-reserve)

The Final Exam session is a required performance session and will take place Wednesday, December 16th, 7:30-9:30 in Coleman Hall 1255. A short presented and orchestrated monologue will be due along with the long paper.

Short Paper Assignment Topics:

9/9/09 Situate yourself critically in relation to the articles and the play due for this session.

10/7/09 In her book *Desire and Anxiety*, Valerie Traub makes the assertion that Shakespeare's "language metaphorizes and materializes desire; . . . such terms as 'blood,' 'flesh,' 'heart,' 'appetite,' 'passion,' and 'death' locate desire in a dispersed corporeal body." In this play, where do you find the language of body parts and pieces? What use does it serve the character who utters them? The play itself?

11/4/09 Graduate student essays often suffer from two maladies. One is "citation-itis" in which the writer feels compelled through voluminous footnotes and over-quoting to "prove" she has done her research. The other is the lack of a larger interpretive argument. Lisa Hopkins' "With the Skin Side Inside: The Interiors of *The Duchess of Malfi*" is guilty of both. Hopkins has done the research and amassed a sizable amount of textual occurrences in relation to the notion of "interiority" from the play. However, the paper abruptly stops there. In two single-spaced pages, develop an argument for Hopkins' essay based on the evidence contained in it.

****Two potentially useful websites:**

Online Concordance to Middleton's plays:

<http://www.tech.org/~cleary/middhome.html>

Resources on John Ford, Thomas Middleton, and John Webster:

<http://www.luminarium.org/renlit/rendrama.htm>